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April 2019

# Story of Our Lives Spanish translation of written statement from co-director Alex Skitolsky

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### Recommended Citation

"Story of Our Lives Spanish translation of written statement from co-director Alex Skitolsky" (2019). *Postville Project Documents*. 8.  
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The seven members of the ensemble initiated the creation of *La Historia de Nuestras Vidas* in conversation with one another and agreed that a play would be the best form for communicating their experiences of the May 12th immigration raid in Postville - with an understanding that they could transcend the language barrier by demonstrating and recreating those experiences. This is a really unique and wonderful aspect of the production: they were not convinced by some outside individual or agency, nor represented by actors in a dramatization of their experiences. They represented themselves in the presentation of *La Historia* and helped each other tell their very important story. Not long after relocating to Decorah (and after serving six month sentences in a series of federal prisons) they shared their idea for the play with Pastor David Vasquez, who has worked devotedly in the Postville relief efforts, and decided as a group on the title for their play. In mid-December, Pastor David started contacting theater artists in the community to help them develop their project.

I was hesitant at first to take up direction of the process, as I speak almost no Spanish - but it seemed that my background in directing original, collaborative theater was particularly well-suited to this project. I asked Kate Blair, a Spanish speaker and graduate of Luther's Department of Theater and Dance, to co-facilitate the process and help organize all of the necessary translation. If not for her and the number of community members who helped record and translate the material, my involvement wouldn't have been possible. It's been an entirely collaborative process and model for the creation of a true people's theater.

The group began by speaking their stories, while facilitators listened and transcribed their spoken narratives directly in Spanish. Once translated into English, I used this text to guide the approach and structure for the play. In January we began meeting twice a week, and the group verified, changed, and added details to this material. They would show us how the events played out, acting out their recollections as an ensemble. For the most part, they directed the staging process, as they know the reality of the scenes best. The group as a whole had very little theater experience before beginning *La Historia*, and they showed some hesitation at first about the idea of performing in the play as well. The theater traditions and culture are very different in their countries. When the Guatemalan filmmaker Luis Argueta recently visited our rehearsals, he commented on the culture of silence and restraint in Guatemala. Due to the constant economic and military unrest there, many Guatemalans are discouraged from speaking-up at a young age. These men have never been short on courage, and they pretty quickly overcame these hesitations. It's remarkable - after all of their mistreatment at the hands of Americans - how trusting they were with our direction and approach to their stories. Their courage, dedication, and hard work in creating the play is a real testament to the character of these seven men. Though the events of May 12, 2008 are still very recent and the effects far-reaching, the endeavor to create this play has provided a source of healing for the ensemble, facilitators, and local audiences. I am grateful for the opportunity to be involved with Teatro Indocumentado in the making of this play. It has been an uncommon realization of theater's unique ability to bridge cultural divides and breach topics of great social relevance, all while remaining deeply personal and present to the moment.

Alex Skitolsky